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**Testimony of Attorney General Martha Coakley**  
**S.B. 206 / H.B. 454, *An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools***  
**Joint Committee on Education**  
**May 30, 2013**

Good morning Chairwoman Chang-Diaz, Chairwoman Peisch, and members of the Committee. I am here today to testify in support of the Senate Bill 206 / House Bill 454, *An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools*, which was filed by the Chairs of this Committee. As you know, in 2010, Governor Patrick signed into law the state's landmark anti-bullying law. Included in that legislation was the creation of a special Commission chaired by the Attorney General to review the General Laws and consider whether amendments should be made to further address bullying and cyber-bullying. The Commission, which comprised various law enforcement and education officials, met seven times, heard presentations from a range of stakeholders, conducted hearings across the state, and filed its report with the Legislature in 2011. The Commission also submitted legislative recommendations, which were reported on favorably by this Committee last session. The bill before you today builds on the Commission's legislative recommendations, and includes certain changes recommended by this Committee last session.

First, it establishes a data collection and reporting mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying efforts. The Commission heard testimony regarding the need for data that would give policymakers an important tool for evaluating

current bullying prevention efforts. This bill authorizes the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“DESE”) to develop and implement a mechanism for collecting incident level data from schools on an annual basis, and requires DESE to report annually to the Legislature and the Attorney General on statewide trends regarding current levels and the nature of bullying. At the same time, this bill attempts to minimize the administrative burden on DESE and schools by authorizing DESE to collect this data through existing data collection mechanisms.

Second, the bill includes a provision, recommended by this Committee last session, directing DESE to develop a student survey. Schools would administer the survey to evaluate the prevalence and severity of bullying from the students’ perspective. Students would have the option of completing the survey anonymously and their privacy would be protected. In an effort to again minimize any administrative burden, the bill requires that the survey be administered only once every three years. The combination of school-reported and student-reported data will help us better understand the prevalence and nature of bullying in our schools. This information will be a valuable tool in evaluating the effectiveness of current bullying prevention efforts and guide future anti-bullying initiatives.

Finally, this bill addresses the extensive and credible testimony received by the Commission concerning the fact that certain categories of students are more vulnerable to becoming the targets of bullying, harassment or teasing. In particular, the Commission heard testimony about the overwhelming prevalence of bullying and harassment against students who either are, or are perceived to be, lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, as well as students with disabilities, and the resulting immediate and long-term adverse

health and mental health consequences for those students. Consequently, this bill requires schools to include in their bullying prevention plans a statement recognizing that certain enumerated categories of students are particularly vulnerable to bullying, and requires school districts to outline specific steps they will take to create a safe, supportive environment for these vulnerable populations.

I applaud the Legislature for its ongoing efforts to provide a safe school environment for all our children – a goal shared by school superintendents, principals, and teachers, as well as parents, community members and local and state law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth. I also commend DESE, and local school districts, teachers, administrators, counselors, nurses and other school personnel for their ongoing efforts to prevent and address bullying. This legislation builds upon the strong foundation of the existing anti-bullying law and the good work being done in our schools every day. I urge the Committee to report the bill out favorably. Thank you.